ON THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE.

The terms "Christian" and "Classic," as applied to church architecture, have originated controversy of a somewhat acrimonious character, and given rise to correspondence which an exercise of even-handed impartiality has induced us to admit into the columns of THE BUILDER; the subject, though interesting, threatens, however, to overrun reasonable limits, and we therefore decide upon terminating it by offering an elucidation consistent with the best authorities open to us.

Catacombs, vaults, and sequestered caves, were the abodes, the churches, and the burial-places of the first Christians; there were deposited the bodies of the earlier saints and martyrs, and whose tombs served as altars, on which the survivors performed their sacred and commemorative rites; when, therefore, the term "Christian Architecture" is used in a broad and general sense, it can apply only to the period when the doctrines of Christianity had so far prevailed over polytheism that its followers were permitted and encouraged to erect temples. Such an event occurred for the first time A.D. 323, when the Emperor Constantine embraced the Christian faith. The subversion of a popular superstition, its mysteries, and its priesthood, was a hazardous measure; and it may be that the odium incurred by the emperor had considerable influence in inducing him to remove the seat of empire to Byzantium.* The leading characteristics of Constantine were decision, and rapidity in executing resolves, and he was true to them in his conduct towards the successor of the apostles, his first act having been a gift to Pope Sylvester of the Palace of the Lateran; this edifice comprised one of those large halls of audience and justice, named *basilicas*, where the emperor gave his decisions, and to which a baptistry of an octagonal form being added, was dedicated to St. John. It may be here remarked that the church similarly named, and in the immediate vicinity of the Lateran, is that in which the popes are to this day inaugurated, and which is inscribed with the pontifical motto, "Totius urbis et orbis princeps."

Other imperial buildings were bestowed by Constantine for religious purposes, and several were built on the skirts of Rome by his order, but in all the original feature was preserved—the *hall* with the addition of the baptistry for celebration of the essential initiatory rite of Christianity. These, then, were the first structures consecrated to Christian worship—buildings in which Pagan emblems abounded, and which had probably been the scene of Pagan invocations and auguries—buildings converted on an impulse, and without thought or immediate conception of fitness, save only in provision for the baptismal rite, which might best be performed within an area of circular construction, that all present should conveniently witness the public profession and acceptance of the convert.

By the death of Constantine in 337, Christianity lost its great supporter; the successors of his name and family were lukewarm, their wavering partialities for previous superstitions being scarcely disguised, and further persecutions were preparing for the church. In 361, Julian publicly sustained the old Pagan rites, and in 375, Valentinian raised altars to the Gods; it was not until 389 that the Emperor Theodosius, in declaring the Christian religion to be that of the state, gave an enduring stimulus to church architecture; the churches of Constantine at Rome, hastily built and already in ruins, shared in the common fate of demolition with the temples of the proscribed Gods, and were replaced by immense structures suited to that unity of belief which requires, at certain periods, the collection of the whole community. It is certain that church builders of this era, in availing themselves of the appliances at their command, were considerate in the uses made of them; *the form and title of the basilica were retained*, and for this decision there were many valid reasons; the churches of Byzantium built by Constantine, and already claiming that species of veneration accorded to priority, were of that form; it had, moreover, the quality of *fitness* in an eminent degree, and the retention of its title was a judicious propitiation of the fierce prejudices of Paganism, as being associated with popular ideas of a site and scene of the administration of justice, and an exercise of the attribute of mercy.

Notwithstanding the lapse of ages, the inroads of time, and its innovations, several of the churches at Rome still retain much of this primitive shape. We have, however, in Hope's historical essay on Architecture, mention of one of these basilicas brought to light in the course of excavations made at Otricoli in 1775, and that industrious and acute observer's remarks upon the conversion and adaptation of the Roman hall to the purposes of Christian worship are well worthy attention. He says of this species of building—"While the temple offered to view external rows of columns, more or less numerous, preceding and surrounding its cella, the basilica seems to have presented nothing externally but a close, bare wall. Whatever porch it might possess was within this, and made no display on the exterior; its principal area, of an oblong form, was divided by a double range of columns in a central avenue, and two lateral aisles, in one of which waited the male, in the other the female candidates for justice. These three longitudinal divisions were terminated by another of a transverse direction, raised a few steps above them, whose length embraced their collective width, and whose destination was to hold the advocates, the notaries, and others engaged in prosecuting causes. Opposite the central avenue, this transept swelled out into one of those semicircular recesses, or terminations, with a ceiling rounded off like the head or couch of a niche, so frequent in the later Roman buildings, called in Greek *Absis*, and in Latin *Tribuna*. In this sat the magistrate, with his assessors, and from this courts of justice have since been called *Tribunals*. Other recesses, semicircular or square, opposite to the lateral avenues, served for different purposes of convenience.

The basilica was thus, not only from its greater size, but from its peculiar distribution, well suited to every purpose of Christian worship. Even supposing some of them to have been open at the sides and over the centre avenue, a wall might close in the one, and a wooden roof cover the other. As by the apostolic constitutions the church was to represent the ship of St. Peter, the centre avenue might represent that *naos* or nave, and even preserve its name, while the lateral aisles might maintain that separation between the sexes considered in early times as necessary at church as in a court of justice. A part of the nave might be screened off from the remainder for the singers that hymned the praises of the Saviour, and furnished with ambones, or pulpits, for the ministers that read the Scriptures. The altar on which the sacrifice for the salvation of man was to be commemorated might be placed at the termination of the nave, in the centre of the transept, already in heathen times, seeming by its disposition with regard to the nave, to have foretold the future triumph of the cross. In the centre Absis might sit, elevated both above the congregation and the altar, instead of the magistrate, the bishop, whose very name, as well as office, called upon him to look around, supported right and left by his clergy, as the former was by his assessors; while the lateral absides might serve as a sacristy and place of purification. Thence, after Constantine had given two *real basilicas*, the Sessorian and the Lateran, to serve as churches, he built his other churches in the same form."

(*To be continued.*)

* Constantinople.

COMMUNICATION WITH IRELAND.

Captains Back and Fair have made a Report to the Lords of the Admiralty, by whom they were employed, as to the pre-eminence to be given to the harbours of Portdynllaen and Holyhead, in connection with the packet intercourse of this country and Ireland. They have examined as to powers of *making the harbours* by vessels under all possible circumstances of difficulty, referring to the exposure to winds, facility of lighting, landmarks, and depth of water; also as to the capacity for docks and harbourage, and their Report is succint, forcible, and convincing. They give to Holyhead an undisputed preference.

PASSING THOUGHTS.

VI.

I cannot afford more than a passing thought to "¶C¶," for I am happy to say my time is a little better taken up than by entering into foolish discussions, which can have no other object than taking up space in this valuable paper, and appear to be commenced merely for the purpose of creating words. If "¶C¶" had given even a little reflection to his note in last number, he would have discovered that he has said nothing to "clearly prove" I am "greatly in error." Surely "¶C¶" must be very sore-headed indeed to defend his initial by such formidable characters as two daggers; I hope he does not intend to be "daggers drawn" with me, for it looks very like the commencement of an onslaught on behalf of the Cambridge Camden Society; however, perhaps he will oblige me by proving more clearly to my dull brain the error in which I am at present existing, for my part I cannot make it out how it is. Hereford Cathedral (the part shewn in page 377), according to two authorities, Britton and Dallaway, was built anterior to 1107, and according to "¶C¶'s" own account, the Norman period did not close till 1154, so that unless he proves that Hereford Cathedral was not built in 1107, his statement must go for nought, and be be set down as a half-informed carper.

VII.

I was much pleased with the remarks offered in the last number respecting the Nelson Column; their justness, I think, no one can deny; for independently of the bad choice of situation, of which much has already been said and sung, it is very clear they have mistaken the means by which to erect a memorial to the Hero of the Nile—the fact is there is no *fitness*, and that's summing up in a few words its *unfitness* for the situation it now occupies.

I should like to see in the designs of memorials a vast deal more of originality; why should we be eternally referring to precedent for every thing we do—did the inventors of these precedents do the same? No, indeed, they did not, or we should not at this time be in possession of such a variety of styles; then why should we look to precedents?

"The reason's plain as way to parish church,"

because the generality of our architects will not give themselves the trouble or the time to think and invent for themselves. Some there are who begin to break through the trammels of rule and precedent, but their attempts at present are crude enough—still they deserve praise as *pioneers*; the Belvedere Apollo or the Medecean Venus were not perfected at one stroke of the chisel.

There are some good points about Mr. Hanson's design for the Sussex Memorial, and the remarks which accompany it are exceedingly good, and shew a great desire to break through the hackneyed routine of every-day design. I do not attempt to say that we cannot design good buildings either in Greek, Roman, or Gothic, because I know to the contrary; but I could wish to see something which would mark our era, and give the architecture of the nineteenth century a distinguished and distinctive position in the Temple of Fame; but there are many prejudices to be overcome before this can be accomplished. Most architects entertain such a veneration and affection for columns and entablatures, that before much can be done with the generality of them, it must be shewn that little credit is due to an architect who makes columns the principal feature of his design, and relies solely upon them to create a good impression—they are things that pass with the vulgar; but no man possessed with a feeling for architecture will be found to give it much praise, well knowing that any person moderately acquainted with the proportions of the orders can design a building to look well who makes one of the orders the principal feature.

J. L. C.

Chinese Tariff.—We observe that in the new tariff under the treaty with China building materials are to be exported from thence duty free. Red and white lead and marble slabs have duties imposed, but of no great amount. Copper may be imported by us, though at a high impost. Iron and Lead are provided for more favourably. Colonial hard woods are also provided for.

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